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ABSTRACT

Iannaccone has suggested that four different types of linkages may be identified between a state's legislature and its organized educational profession: (1) locally based disparate in which legislators and schoolmen primarily represent just their individual school districts; (2) statewide monolithic in which schoolmen speak with one, powerful and united voice on behalf of education; (3) statewide syndical in which a coalition of schoolmen and legislators cooperatively reach compromises on policy; and (4) statewide fragmented in which interest groups are sharply divided and there is much competition and conflict. Michigan seems to contain two types of political structure in education. While it has been described as a "fragmented" state in the provision of school resources, the administration of the state's compensatory education program was decidedly "syndical." Because there is such constant threat of partisan conflict over education, every opportunity is taken by lawmaker and school official alike to permit accommodations of state and local interests through "subsystem" politics. (Author/IRT)

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# State Administrative Politics in Education: A Case Study of State-Local Interaction in Michigan

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Although there has been much interest in recent years in the politics of education at the state level, research to date has typically concentrated upon the formation of school law rather than its implementation. There has been little investigation which asks: What happens to a state-aid enactment after it leaves the hands of the legislature and is turned over to a state education department to be carried out? Is there a special form and style of administrative politics which is distinguishable from a state's prevailing pattern of lawmaker approval? Do generalizations about the "politics" of state educational arrangements apply equally well to both lawmaking and program administration?

## State Structures

There has been just a single, courageous attempt to develop a "typology" of political structures for state education systems. Using data generated by others (principally the research of Masters, Salisbury, and Eliot), Laurence Iannaccone suggested that four different types of linkages may be identified between a state's legislature and its organized educational profession.[1] These are: (I) locally-based disparate--where legislators and schoolmen primarily represent just their individual school districts; (II) state-wide monolithic--where schoolmen speak with one, powerful and united voice on behalf of education; (III) state-wide syndical--where a coalition of schoolmen and legislators cooperatively reach compromises on policy, and (IV) state-wide fragmented--where interest groups are sharply divided and there is much competition and conflict.



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In illustrating his typology, Iannaccone drew attention to the contrasting styles of political linkages which seemed to characterize Illinois and Michigan. From the Masters et al. data, he noted that Illinois contained many diverse and active groups with much potential influence over school policy. However, a special mediating structure (The Illinois School Problems Commission) functioned to compromise the state's varied interests into a "united front" for education. The School Problems Commission included representation from the state's education interests as well as leading "education" members of the legislature. It served to deflect and to avoid damaging controversy, in a quiet negotiation of school policies which would be politically acceptable. In place of this "syndical" style, Michigan, on the other hand, was found to be highly "fragmented." Many educational interests vied for and exerted power. There was no conflict management group available to prevent the generation of political heat. Consequently, decision-making for education in Michigan tended to take place within a high conflict and highly partisan atmosphere--resulting in little predictability in legislation for the state's schools and much controversy, frequently involving sharp divisions between Michigan's political parties.

Although his typology has interesting conceptual value, Iannaccone's work hasn't received much empirical support. Critics point out that the Illinois situation has changed and that a syndical style of education politics has failed to appear in any other state. In their exhaustive, twelve-state study of state policy-making, Roald F. Campbell and his colleagues (The Educational Governance Project) have found little support for Iannaccone's analysis and have yet to find any other evidence that a meaningful typology of state structure can be delineated. Each of the states reported upon thus far

appears to be, or is rapidly becoming, considerably "fragmented" in political style.[2]

## The Michigan Setting

Despite its general lack of support, recent case-study evidence suggests that Iannaccone's differentiation of state policy-making structures retains considerable vitality. Research into the policy formation process (usually the passage of state education legislation) has not been very fruitful. However, an investigation into procedures for policy implementation (the administration of school law) in Michigan suggests that the types of political linkages outlined by Iannaccone still have an interesting applicability. In Michigan, found to be a highly "fragmented" state by every student of education politics, it was discovered that department of education structures for the administration of a state-aid program were markedly "syndical." In program administration, Michigan was found to have moved far from the unpredictable, highly partisan and high conflict atmosphere, with a hostile or at best indifferent legislature, which commonly characterizes descriptions of education policy-making. An investigation into the administration of a special grant-in-aid effort saw the development of a close lawmaker-educator alliance in the containment of conflict and in the protection of the shared interests of state and local school organizations.

The Michigan program involved state-aid to local school districts for compensatory education. Known over the years by its legislative origins as the "Section 3 Program," Michigan's compensatory effort has provided upwards of $22,500,000 to local districts annually for the education of disadvantaged children. Beginning in 1968 as a rather small program of increased state-aid

for specially selected "disadvantaged-area" schools, Section 3 became a very sizable and innovative grant effort by the early 1970's. By the 1971-72 school year, funds under the program were being distributed to local schools on the basis of statewide test results in the "basic skill" areas of reading and mathematics. Furthermore, by 1971-72, the program also included a provision for local "accountability." School districts receiving the compensatory dollars were to meet stipulated performance objectives in public achievement for the year--or lose a portion of their next year's Section 3 grant.

With statewide testing and a concept of accountability, Section 3 promised much controversy. The program was received with considerable skepticism by local administrators. By some, it was loudly labeled a "child punishment" idea, taking away dollars from the state's neediest children should they fail to meet certain achievement standards. In implementing the program, and in efforts to transfer typically vague legislation into clearly stated rules and regulations, the Michigan Department of Education faced tough battles with its local clients. Issues developed in the distribution of resources between Detroit, "middle city" school districts, and rural areas; in the definition of accountability standards; in the local use of state-aid resources; and in relations between Section 3 and other grant-in-aid programs. With its "fragmented" politics, many of the administrative issues characterizing Michigan's unique compensatory education effort offered large opportunities for very sharp and heated conflicts between state and locality.

## A Politics of Administration

As state-local clashes arose, however, educators and lawmakers cooperated to keep the Michigan program well under control. Section 3 was highly specialized state-aid aimed at a very narrow range of school district clientele. As it

developed over the years, the program gained a complexity and technology understandable to few persons outside its immediate orbit of state administrators, local recipients, and legislative leaders.

In general, the legislature assisted state and local administrative officials in keeping the implementation of the program away from damaging controversy and essentially "out of politics." At lawmaker insistance, compromised revisions in annual compensatory education legislation were worked out in advance by the state department with its Detroit, middle city, and rural clients. The lawmakers also expected technical difficulties in the definition and implementation of administrative rules to be handled effectively by the schoolmen without need for legislative intervention. Twice when this strategy failed, the legislature quietly passed "grandfathering" legislation at mid-year--restoring funds to schools adversely affected by rules changes. In each instance, questions of race (allocations to black vs. white schools) or geography (distributions to rural vs. urban districts) posed potentially hazardous consequences for the future of Section 3. In two equally difficult situations, the legislature also cooperated in actions to "forgive" local school districts for a failure to reach standards of accountability. Despite its interest in the accountability idea, the legislature passed forgiveness with little difficulty--recognizing the need to avoid a very long, very public, and very damaging dispute over a controversial clause in its compensatory education law.

## Discussion

It may be suggested, from the Michigan experience, that a state may simultaneously contain more than one type of political structure in education. While Michigan has been described as a "fragmented" state generally in the

provision of school resources, the administration of the state's Section 3 program for compensatory education was decidely "syndical." It would appear that other studies of state education politics may be applying the term "fragmented" to a less than fully representative slice of state education endeavor. Where there are narrowly focused programs with narrow ranges of clientele interest and where much policy is left to the administrative process, a much different type of "politics" in education is likely to appear.

It may be suggested further that a nominally "fragmented" state, like Michigan, will be characterized to a high degree by an accompanying style of "subsystem," or syndical, administrative politics. With many educator groups competing for political advantage and with tendencies toward political conflict and unpredictability in legislative outcomes, there will be strong incentives for states to "balkanize" their grantin-aid- offerings. Thus, in Michigan a special program of compensatory education for the cities is accompanied by busing reimbursements for rural schools. State grants are also established for remedial reading, for special education, for the gifted, and for vocational education. Because there is such constant threat of partisan conflict over education, every opportunity is taken by lawmaker and school official alike to permit accommodations of state and local interests through "subsystem" politics. Boundaries are established between programs and boundary disputes are carefully avoided--permitting policy in special areas to be made by a few in a state where there is a tendency to involve many.

## Footnotes

[1]Laurence Iannaccone, Politics in Education (New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1967), pp. 47-50. Much of his analysis is based upon the work of Masters et al. See, Nicholas A. Masters, Robert H. Salisbury, and Thomas H. Eliot, State Politics and the Public Schools: An Exploratory Analysis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964).

[2]Roald F. Campbell, Tim L. Mazzoni, Jr., and others, "The Educational Governance Project," A presentation of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 17, 1974.